

Condos Over Kids: The Last Remaining French Quarter School May Close

Plessy School quietly attempting relocation out of historic French Quarter building, opening a possible sale of the valuable real estate

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA, US, February 11, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Homer Plessy Community School, home of the "Quarter Kids" will no longer be located in the French Quarter, if a proposal to relocate the school to the Bywater goes through. This move will pull the last remaining children out of the French Quarter, leaving a site that has held a schoolhouse since 1860.

Located at 721 St. Phillip St, between Royal and Bourbon Streets, Homer Plessy Community School took over the former McDonogh 15 School Building in 2017. This historic building was initially built in 1932 on land bequeathed to the City of New Orleans in 1865. It had held a schoolhouse since at 1860.



Homer Plessy French Quarter

The Homer Plessy Community School, however, is now quietly discussing a move out of the French Quarter, to the Arise Academy campus at 3819 St Claude Ave in the Bywater. The nine lot building Plessy currently occupies between Royal and Bourbon Street could be one of the most valuable in the French Quarter to developers, and would likely suffer the same fate as the St. Louis Cathedral Academy, which closed in 2013 and has since become "The Academy" – luxury apartments available for \$2450 - \$3695 per month. A move by Plessy to the soon available Arise Academy location could allow for a sale of the property by the Orleans Parish School Board.

This move to relocate the school has thus far been discussed in secret between members of the Plessy School Board. As of this writing, only some teachers have been notified, and parents of Plessy students have not been asked for opinion, comment, or even notified of the proposal. In a

December Board meeting agenda, this proposal was cryptically referred to as “Building Opportunities”. In the February Plessy School Board meeting, this proposal was discussed, but was not included as an agenda item. The Board meeting minutes have not been published to the Plessy Website since October 2020. The next board meeting will come after the proposal for the building must be submitted, leaving no time for comment or discussion.

While the Plessy school campus, owned by OPSB, is apparently in need of renovations, alternative plans for fund raising have not been considered by or offered to the parents, teachers and other stakeholders of the Homer Plessy Community School.

Plessy is now one of the most diverse schools in New Orleans, a goal specifically enacted by the founders of the school. After years of difficulty fully integrating the school while located in the 7th ward, Plessy was moved to the French Quarter with the goal of “spurring growth, and attracting a broader base of students”. Now the school is looking to move out of the Quarter, without addressing that the opposite effect may likely take hold.

When Plessy was founded, Julie Hanks, Director of Development said “If you’re from Uptown or the 9th Ward, or Lakeview, or the East, everybody has a chance to come into the French Quarter and feel a part of the city as a whole. Which is also what we are hoping to reflect in our hallways: that all are welcome.”

The arts-focused curriculum is especially integrated within the French Quarter. From the brass bands that greet kids at the beginning of each semester, to musical greats like Trombone Shorty and Big Freedia who have taught students and have led the annual Plessy second line, to the daily walks through the neighborhood to experience the art and culture that makes up the French Quarter - simply being located in the Quarter provides numerous benefits for student education.

This benefit goes both ways - for the French Quarter, the diversity, youth, excitement and expansion of knowledge centered in the school helps the Quarter stay an interesting, vibrant and culturally relevant part of New Orleans. Moving this school, removing that diversity, and replacing it with additional condos or hotel rooms further solidifies the French Quarter as a place that isn’t for, and isn’t accessible to, most people who live in New Orleans.

New Orleans complicated system of application to charter schools looks more similar to a medical school match than most state’s public school systems, and often forces parents to make decisions for their child’s next 9-13 years during the kindergarten application process. A lottery for the best rated schools happens each year. When parents pick a school, they may be picking a philosophy or group of teachers, but are most often picking a location – a building, a neighborhood, an environment in which they want their kids to be educated in. Many parents chose Plessy because of its location – sacrificing spots at better rated, more convenient, or private schools - to send their kids to be educated in the French Quarter of New Orleans.

Homer Plessy has become an integral part of the French Quarter, as the school located at 721 St Phillip St has been since 1860. Likewise, the French Quarter has become an integral part of the education taught at Homer Plessy Community School. A move to a new building may solve short term problems and be profitable for the OPSB, but may ultimately lead to negative outcomes for both the students of Homer Plessy, and the French Quarter as a whole.

The deadline for proposal for this move comes this March, with the next Plessy board meeting not occurring until April. Parents of Plessy students have not thus far been notified of or consulted for opinion on this proposal.

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